

# Laugharne Castle

in the town of Laugharne, Carmarthenshire, south Wales  
SN 303 107



[Map link for Laugharne Castle](#)



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**Cadw 1991; Avent 1988**

Laugharne is perhaps best known for its associations with Dylan Thomas, but for the past 20 years, the picturesque castle, sited on the Taf estuary, has been the subject of painstaking archaeological investigation and gradual restoration. There was probably a Norman castle here by the early 12th century, though the upstanding remains can be traced back no further than the work of the de Brian family in the late 13th century. From the de Brians and their descendants, in 1488 the lordship and castle passed to the earls of Northumberland. In 1584, Elizabeth I granted Laugharne to Sir John Parrott, said to have been the illegitimate son of Henry VIII.



The castle stands on a low cliff by the side of the Coran stream, overlooking the estuary of the river Taf. Laugharne may be the castle mentioned in about 1116 as the castle of Robert Courtemain, but the first definite reference to the Norman castle is in 1189 when, after the death



of King Henry II, it was seized by [the Lord Rhys](#), prince of Deheubarth. It attracted further hostility from the Welsh in 1215 when it was destroyed by [Llywelyn the Great](#) and later, in 1257, when it was again taken and burnt.

The early 12th century castle was probably a [ringwork](#), and traces of an important building with a large hearth have been found during excavations at the site. The castle was remodelled in the second half of the 12th century; the interior of the ringwork was partially filled in, new defences were constructed and a large rectangular hall was built on the north. By the time of the Welsh attack in 1257, the castle was in the ownership of the de Brian family and it was Guy de Brian IV who, evidently determined to create a much more defensible structure, started to build the strong masonry castle which we see today.

Below: two views of the inner ward at Laugharne Castle.





The de Brians remained the lords of Laugharne until the end of the 14th century, and during their long occupancy, carried out considerable additions and repairs. In 1349 the lordship was inherited by the distinguished Guy de Brian VII, who greatly improved the overall standard of accommodation within the castle. Guy de Brian's death in 1390 was followed by a long period of decline and in the late 15th and early 16th century only parts of the castle were occupied. However, a real change came about in the castle's fortunes when, in 1575, Elizabeth I granted it to [Sir John Perrot](#), an important dignitary who converted the old medieval castle into a comfortable Tudor mansion, rather as he did at his main residence at [Carew](#). Unfortunately for the castle, Perrot became too powerful for Royal comfort, and in 1592 he was sentenced to death for high treason; he died, though from natural causes, in the same year. An inventory made in 1592 suggests that Perrot's building was of rather poor quality and that the castle 'is like within a few yeares to run to utter ruin again'.

The castle ruins are, therefore, the end result of a long development from earthwork castle to Tudor mansion. This complex history makes the castle, at first sight, difficult to understand. Little visible now remains of the ringwork bank, nor of the first stone hall, which was probably demolished in the late 12th century. The rebuilding under the de Brians in the late 13th century is far more evident within the standing remains. The two strong round towers on the north were built at this time along with the curtain wall, some of which survives. The impressive north-west tower still retains its fine medieval domed roof. The tower acted as a keep and also as a guardian for the simple entrance through the curtain to its south. The other tower, a solid three-storey structure, has partially fallen, and the section through the tower exposed by the collapse gives a good view of the two extra storeys and the circular stair added in the Tudor period. A new hall was built in stone against the south curtain wall during this late 13th century rebuilding, and the outer ward, if not already in existence, may also have been added then, but probably with only timber defences at this stage.









At the end of the 13th century, the defences were further strengthened. A forward projecting gatehouse was built against the earlier, simple entrance into the inner ward. A new round tower with deep spurs was built at the south-west corner of the inner ward and the defences of the outer ward, including the outer gatehouse, were rebuilt in stone. The castle had so far been constructed in red sandstone, but in the mid-14th century Guy de Brian VII used for his building a distinctive green stone, which is quite easy to detect. The whole south-western corner of the inner ward, including the round tower and the inner gatehouse, was considerably heightened. This building phase is particularly clear on the outside of the castle, where the

green stone heightening can easily be seen distinguished from the older masonry on the south-west tower and adjacent curtain wall.

[Sir John Perrot](#) drastically altered this medieval castle by converting it into a substantial Tudor mansion. The old hall against the south curtain was completely remodelled and the curtain wall heightened with mock battlements. Ranges of Tudor buildings extended around the south and east of the inner ward and, on the north, the curtain wall between the two towers was demolished and replaced by a large rectangular accommodation block. Its upper floors were reached by a splendid projecting semicircular stair tower. The inner gatehouse was made more impressive by being considerably raised to its present height and gardens were laid out in the outer ward.

During the Civil War, Laugharne was captured by Royalists in 1644, but was quickly re-taken by besieging Roundheads. The castle was partially destroyed soon afterwards and gradually fell into decay. It was left as a romantic ruin during the 18th century and at the turn of the 19th century the outer ward was laid with formal gardens. The gazebo overlooking the estuary was used in the 1930s and 40s by the author Richard Hughes, who leased Castle House during this period.

**Additional Photographs of Laugharne Castle**





















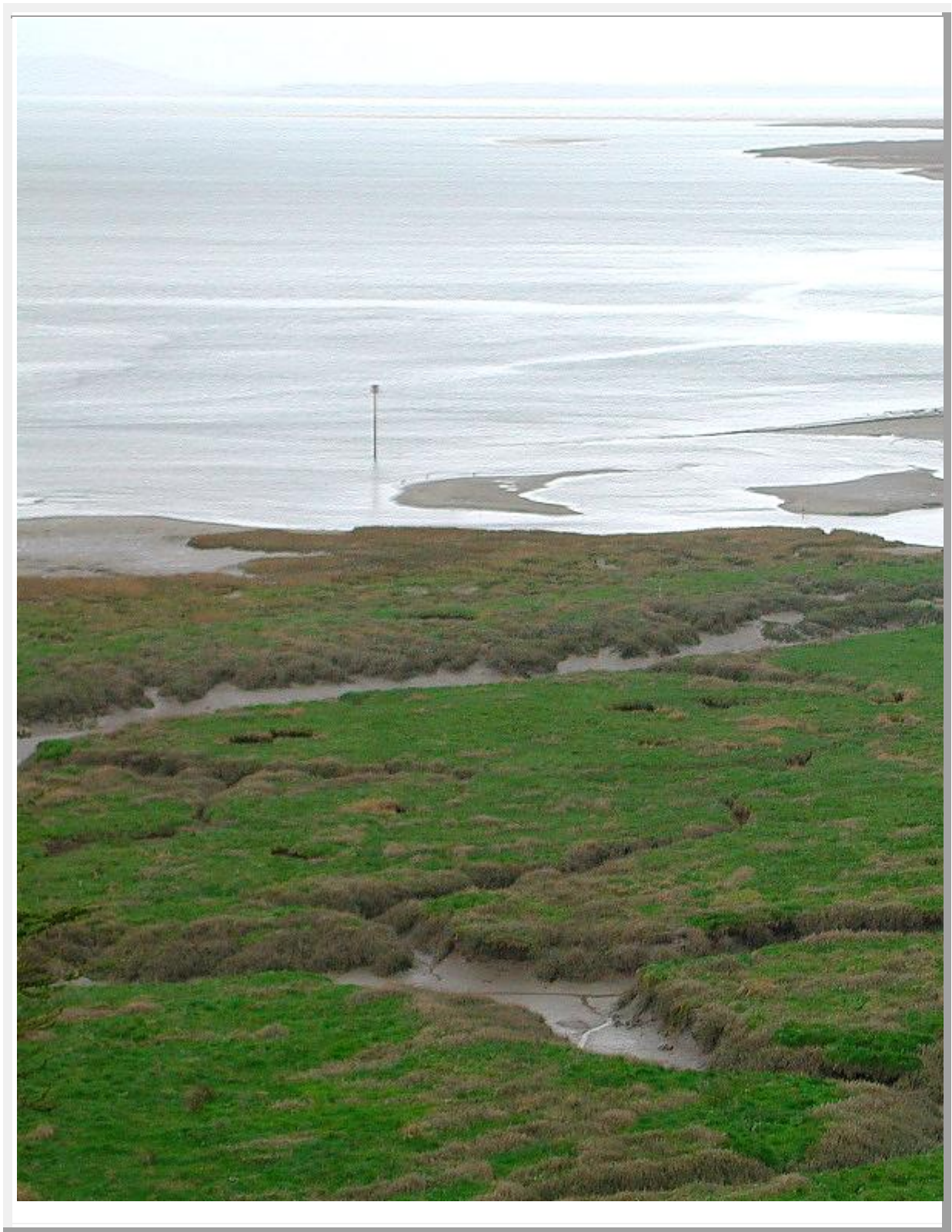












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